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ABSTRACT

A discussion of public language policy formation focuses on the situation in the Netherlands and Europe. First, a number of considerations in the formation of second language instruction policy are reviewed, including determination of content, conditions of instruction, and languages to be taught. The Dutch national program for foreign language instruction is described. The program was designed to enhance language instruction, in response to concern about the foreign language competence and projected language competence needs of the Dutch population. Some of the program's policy recommendations are summarized, including those concerning the role of language instruction in the overall education system, how to divide language instruction within and outside the formal education system, regulatory measures, and adjustment of objectives to match language needs. The political perspectives of two international organizations, the Council of Europe and the European Community, are also outlined. It is concluded that a policy for language instruction should be established separate from general educational policy and general language use policy, and that the role of central authorities, governmental and organizational, may vary a great deal. A brief list of references, data on Dutch children's language competence, and a policy-formation checklist are appended. (MSE)

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"Foreign Language Policy-Making from a Dutch and European Point of View",

by Theo J.M. van Els (University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands)

at the NFLC, Washington, DC, Institute of Advanced Studies
October 12, 1990

1. Introduction

I hardly need to say how honoured I feel to have been invited to speak at this first seminar of the Public Policy Series of the Institute of Advanced Studies at the NFLC. How important discussions of public policy-making in the field of languages, in particular foreign languages, are for the future of this country, Dr.Lambert will no doubt find occasion to bring up in his comments later on. It is not for me, as a relative outsider, to express my views on that issue. The contribution that I hope I can make to-day, is to present to you some of the thinking that has been going on recently concerning foreign language policy-making on the other side of the Atlantic, mainly -but not exclusively- in The Netherlands. I will try to leave aside specifically local, i.e. Dutch and/or European, details as much as possible, and chiefly concentrate on points of general, if not of universal, relevance.

The background from which I address today's topic is, I think, adequately described in the letter of invitation and the information attached to it concerning me and my work. In the course of my presentation I will expand a little on the LINGUA-Programme of the European Community and the work of the Council of Europe. I will dwell much longer on the recently developed Dutch National Action Programme for Foreign Languages.

What I intend to do, then, is roughly the following. I will first review with you -and make an attempt to put some order to- the great number of considerations that come, or rather should come, into play when foreign language policies are being discussed. Then I will briefly describe the rationale for, and aspects of the design of the project that led to, the Dutch Action Programme and mention some of the findings of the research that we

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conducted in connection with it. That I will follow up by discussing, firstly, some of the policy-recommendations that we have arrived at in the Dutch Programme, and, secondly, the foreign language political stance of two major European organizations. The points that will come up for discussion, will mainly be raised in the light of the preceding 'theoretical' discussion of a general nature.

2. Issues in Foreign Language Teaching Planning

The planning of the teaching of foreign languages should be embedded in, at least presupposes, a policy concerning the use of foreign languages, which policy in its turn should be incorporated in an overall language policy. This applies to policy-making for countries -which we are concerned with this afternoon-, but also in a similar way for all other organizations. A point we would like to make here with some emphasis is that the existence of a separate foreign language teaching policy as distinguished from a, of necessity wider, foreign languages policy is not without importance. Too often, also in the recent past, findings, for example, as to the need for the use of (a) foreign language(s) have only been accounted for with regard to their consequences for the instruction of them in an educational setting. We touch upon this point again later on.

Another 'state-of-the-art'-like comment may be in place here, more or less as an aside. As I have remarked elsewhere (Van Els 1990:87), in publications concerning language policy-making in general the subfield that we are working in here, i.e. that of foreign language teaching policy, is hardly ever even touched upon, nor is there, for that matter, an awareness of the wider field of foreign languages policy.

Devising a policy for foreign language teaching basically comes down to answering the same set of questions, of course, that crop up in educational policy-making in general. The same kind of choices have to be made, the same decisions confront the planner. Roughly speaking two categories of such questions may be distinguished: first, those that relate to the offering of instruction to the learners; secondly, those that relate to the creation and continuing support of the necessary educational conditions. This may sound very abstract. Let me, therefore, try to be more concrete and explicit. The first category concerns aspects of the teaching-content, by which I mean such questions as what to teach and how to teach; we will expand this very global subdivision presently, when we apply it to foreign language teaching. The second category of questions relates to the responsibility for such things as the establishing of schools or programmes, for certification and exam structures, for the

training and retraining of teachers; all of them constituting conditions for teaching (and learning, of course).

Before expanding further this distinction for the field of foreign language teaching, let me introduce quickly a third set of questions, i.e. basically questions as to who are to take all these decisions and/or to carry all these responsibilities. It is not irrelevant whether the learning of a particular foreign language is made obligatory for everyone by the national or local educational authorities, or is left to the free choice of each individual pupil. As it is, there are other parties that may be authorized to decide on matters of content or may be (made) responsible for the creation or upholding of conditions, such as schoolboards, groups of teachers, and inidividual teachers. The most important points to note here are that (1) independent of who decides on or is responsible for a particular matter, all the issues of content and conditions must be attended to in the development of a foreign language teaching policy; even if (2), on the other hand, the actual choices made and the actual forms conditions can take depend in one way or another on who is the responsible actor or agent. What I would want to warn against with some emphasis is the not uncommon attitude that there is only a need for considering policy-matters, if the responsibility for choices lies with centrally-located educational authorities. And the other point to make is that the very decisions as to who makes the choices and/or is responsible for the conditions, form part of the educational policy as such.

For the following discussion of the details of a foreign language teaching policy I would like to refer you to the first of your handouts (Chart 1). It will not be necessary to devote any further attention to the category of the conditions after what we have already said about them in the preceding part, nor will I dwell further on the various groups or individuals with whom choices and responsibilities rest. All that should be self-evident now. Needless to say, the Chart does not represent a fully worked out picture of all the elements that are at play in the policy-making business. In particular much more detail could have been added as to the ways the various elements are interrelated and to the ways in which they may interact with each other. And it is not just on details of the Chart that differences of opinion are possible, of course. But even so, it may serve a useful purpose in the context of this afternoon's discussion.

[** Chart 1 , to be composed out of the following elements:
- (title:) Chart 1: "Choices and Responsibilities in Foreign Language Teaching Policy-Making"
- (in the left margin, vertically:)
  x 'choices' concerning content
   (1) = yes/no
       = how many
       = which

= what content, to what level
= etc.
(2) = to whom, individually or in groups
= at what age, when
= educational setting
= etc.
(3) = method of teaching
= classroom, self-learning
= teaching/learning aids
= etc.
x 'responsibilities' regarding conditions
(1) = schools, programmes, course-materials, etc.
(2) = evaluation, testing, exams
(3) = teacher training, certification, etc.
(4) = etc.
- (in the top margin, horizontally:)
x 'choices' and/or 'responsibilities' rest with
= pupils
= (groups of) parents
= (groups of) teachers
= head of school
= schoolboard
= educational authorities,
: local
: regional
: national
: supernational]
[see separate sheet]

Restricting myself, then, to the content-part of the Chart, I would first like to point out that the former of the two global questions what and how can be further subdivided into two groups, i.e. (1) any foreign languages to be taught?, if so, how many languages?, and which?, on the one hand, and (2) to whom?, when?, at what age?, and where?, on the other.

The way the two subgroups are represented in our provisional Chart certainly brings out incompletely the various intricate relations that hold between elements of the two subgroups. To point out just one or two: the choices concerning which foreign languages to teach do not necessarily hold in the same way for all (groups of) pupils, and, if it has been decided to teach specifically two foreign languages to everybody, that does not necessarily mean that both these languages will be taught to them simultaneously, at the same age, or -for that matter- in the same educational context or the same type of school. A case in point might be the teaching of English in The Netherlands. There is no doubt at all in anybody's mind that every citizen of the country has to learn and, also, has to be taught the language. Even then, of course, it is imaginable that the choice to learn English is left to each individual student and/or his/her parents, since we can be pretty sure that no one in this particular case would want to choose against his/her own good interests by choosing not to

learn it. As the case is, the Dutch government have decided to make English obligatory for everyone. They have also decided to make English an obligatory subject for everyone in primary and in the first phase of secondary education. My point is that, although I personally agree with both decisions, the latter decision does not automatically follow from the former. For, in principle it is imaginable that different groups of pupils should fulfill the obligation to learn English at different stages of their school careers, i.e. in different types of school, as long as they are taught the language somewhere, somehow.

What, now, are the arguments on which choices are based by educational authorities or, for that matter, individual persons, when they have to make choices regarding the content-issues? Basically, such choices in the field of foreign language teaching -as in all other educational fields- are derived from some kind of perception of the need for the subject in question. At least, one would hope so, although there are school subjects whose only raison d'etre, according to some, seems to be that they have always formed part of the school-curriculum. And, of course, it is possible that a subject is included in the curriculum for the simple reason that there has got to be something, whichever, to fill the timetable, in which case the choice for the subject in question is justified by arguments external to the subject itself. I do not know of cases in our field to which this would apply.

'Needs' are, however, tricky things to define and they come in all sorts, it seems, also in our field. You only have to look up the list of arguments that are frequently cited in this country in favour of foreign language teaching, as enumerated by Rivers (1968:8-9)(summarised in Van Els et al. 1984:161). They vary from: 'foreign language learning furthers intellectual development' and 'it contributes to better international relations', to 'it enables learners to communicate with speakers of a different language'. In our country, at one time not so long ago, a popular argument for French especially among French teachers was that the 'selective power' of t is difficult language was much greater than that of either English or German.

I think, as I have pointed out at several previous occasions, that in our field needs can usefully be divided into three categories. You can find them on the second Chart.

Chart 2: "Factors Determining the Choice of Foreign Languages

I NEEDS

1. needs for communicative skills
2. needs somehow linked to the communicative skills, such as familiarity with the culture or the literature of another nation

3. needs which are not, or at best only indirectly, linked to skills in the foreign language, e.g. 'learning to think logically'

II OTHER FACTORS

1. language policy factors
2. linguistic factors
3. psychological factors
4. educational factors

[see separate sheet]

I have always thought it important to somehow arrive at some kind of weighting of the great many arguments -put forward as so many needs that have to be satisfied- in favour of the learning and teaching of foreign languages. The subcategorization presented in Chart 2 is an attempt at such a weighting, and personally I think it is a helpful one. To my mind the three categories represent a scale of importance, descending from one through two down to three, which is particularly valuable in situations where either foreign languages are competing with other subjects for a place in the curriculum or where the introduction of one foreign language has to be balanced against that of another. It would lead much too far to elaborate on that, but one example may be called for. In the situation where a choice has to be made between several foreign languages -which is not such an unlikely situation in The Netherlands as it would seem to be in this country-, the third category would not normally seem to carry any weight, for it is not very likely that only the teaching of one specific language would, for example, encourage 'logical reasoning'.

You will have noticed in the meantime that the Chart also contains a second box, called 'other factors'. Needs may be important factors to consider in policy-making, and they may also be the first factors to take into account, but educational policies cannot be based on them exclusively. The Chart, I should again add, no doubt lends itself to amendment and correction. I should also hasten to add that I have not given much thought to the order in which the 'other factors' are presented. But, just to bring out how essential it is to bring also these factors to bear when developing a foreign language teaching policy, let me give two examples of their impact:

(1) Some languages are more difficult to learn than others, and some languages are commonly thought to be so difficult that it takes several years more to study them than others. A case in point, of course, is Japanese. Let us, just for the sake of the argument, assume that on an average Japanese would take American (and Dutch) secondary school pupils over five years of continued study to achieve any mastery of the language. If, now, that

amount of time, or other facilities required, cannot be made available in secondary education, the provision for the language will have to be made elsewhere or given another shape, even if there is ample evidence of a general need for Japanese. An important aspect of educational policy-making that this brings up, is that it is always recommendable to look further than the one particular segment of the educational system that one happens to be planning for: other segments have to be taken into consideration as well. I will return to this point when discussing the Dutch situation.

(2) My second example may even be somewhat closer to the American situation. From what I have read about foreign language teaching in your schools, for the greater part it is restricted in a number of senses: pupils usually only take one language and they spend a very limited number of years studying it. The main reason for that seems to me to be -but now I am tresspassing on grounds that I am not too familiar with, so I may well be mistaken-, that the arguments for the learning of the foreign language are essentially derived from needs of the third category. That such teaching and learning does not provide the learner after his studies with any useful communicative skills in that foreign language, may as such be quite justifiable from the analysis of the needs picture. I have the feeling, however, that not everybody in this country is very happy with this state of affairs, from an educational point of view. I will not say more on that, because I am quite sure that Dr.Lambert will return to the point.

3. The Dutch National Action Programme: Background, Design, Results

It would be out of the question to fully describe both the project that we ran and the recommendations that we drew up for the Minister of Education. The former was reported in a publication of over 260 pages (Van Hest et al. 1990), the latter were brought out in a separate publication of over 60 pages (see Van Els et al. 1990). In this part of my paper I will deal with some aspects of (A) the background, (B) the design and (C) the results of the project, mainly in the light of the foregoing discussion. In the next part I will highlight those recommendations that to my mind may be of relevance to discussions in this country.

A. The Background

It usually comes as a bit of a surprise when I inform foreigners that people in The Netherlands worry a great deal about the state of the nation's foreign language competence. The Dutch have a reputation for being among the most competent speakers of foreign languages. I can understand the feeling of surprise a little, when I compare data on foreign language teaching in other countries with Dutch data. See, for example, the data on the

actual competencies of the 1977 cohort of Dutch 12 year olds, presented in Chart 3, which we computed in the context of the project that led to the Action Programme that I will be describing presently.

[a reproduction of overhead sheet, completed with a summary indication of what the 5 levels stand for at the bottom, which should read as follows:

'zero' : no instruction
'one' : 2 or 3 years of (basic) instruction, without absolving final exam
'two' : 3 or 4 years of basic instruction with diploma, or 3 or 4 years of intermediate instruction without diploma
'three': 5 or 6 years of intermediate instruction with diploma
'four' : language specialists from higher education

The heading should read as follows:

Chart 3: "Proficiency Levels for English, German and French of the Dutch 1977-Cohort of Twelve Year Olds"

Erase the "1977 CBS-cohort" that is on the overhead sheet]
[see separate sheet]

What we have here, is a global but also representative picture of the foreign language competence of the Dutch population as a whole, we may say, in as far, however, -and these are a very important restrictions to make- such competence relates to English, French and German, and also in as far as it is engendered in the regular school system! This means that we leave aside any competence acquired in other languages; any competence acquired in the languages in question outside of our schools; but also all the loss that may have occurred after completion of instruction. I should also draw your attention to the fact that levels have here been thought of, mainly, in terms of 'years of instruction'. From the Chart you can read that, more or less, every Dutchman has had instruction in the English language and that two thirds of the population have taken a school leaving exam in it, which means that they have acquired at least a reasonable level of competence; that for German the comparable statistics are just over 80% and 45% respectively; and for French 60% and just over 35% respectively. Let me hasten to add that I do not know of comparable foreign language competence data relating to other countries. All we have is -some- information on the foreign language offerings in the school systems of a number of mainly European countries; hardly any information is available on the actual school careers of the relevant student populations elsewhere. If, then, I say that I can understand a little of people's surprise at hearing of a general worry in my country concerning our foreign language competences, I base myself solely on comparative information concerning the provisions for foreign

languages in the various school systems. Lack of time, however, precludes me from working out the comparison any further at this moment (for such information see, however, Hoelscher 1989 and Van Els & Extra 1987).

What, then, are these big worries that we in The Netherlands are having on account of our foreign language competences?

Very basically, these worries boil down to two things. On the one hand, the general assessment of the need situation is that our foreign language needs have been growing in recent times and that they will continue to grow at an even faster rate in the years to come. In particular the year 1992 will mark a sizable step forward towards the political and economical unification of the European Community. On the other hand, there is the feeling of many that our educational system is not any more quite producing the levels of foreign language competence of the old days, neither quantitatively nor qualitatively. In the latter feeling you will discern, of course, the universally -and timelessly- operative sentiment concerning <u>all</u> contemporary education, holding that in times gone by it was all much, much better. And, in the Dutch context those expressing that kind of sentiment invariably point to the not inconsiderable changes in the school system introduced in the last two to three decades, which -admittedly, for that matter- have not left the provisions for foreign languages unaffected. For your information, however, the picture that I presented just now represents, more or less, what our <u>present</u> system produces.

This is not the time or place to expand on the pros and cons and other merits of these two worries. Some points we will return to later on. The important thing about them is that these worries were apparently shared and publicly discussed by so many, strikingly enough not only by those with personal stakes in the business of teaching foreign languages. And, what was most striking -and a thing, it seems, most unlikely to happen in this country for some time to come (see Lambert 1990)- the lead in these discussions was taken by a number of organizations from the world of business and commerce, in reports and memoranda drawn up by or for them concerning the prognosticated effects of the growing European unification in 1992. It was because of this kind of pressure -and under instigation also of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Economic Affairs- that the Minister of Education decided that he would commission the drawing up of a National Action Programme for Modern Foreign Languages.

There was no doubt in anybody's mind that "something had to be done". However, it was not easy to perceive what exactly, since the advice that the Minister of Education had been getting was exceedingly varied and not seldom contradictory: mostly he was prompted to increase the <u>quantity</u> of instruction in foreign languages in a great many different ways, but he was also advised to improve the situation <u>qualitatively</u> once and for all by simply adopting the one and only right way of teaching foreign languages -developed by the person in question, of course- which he claimed

to be twice as effective as all other methods had been so far! The Minister, therefore, decided to seek advice in this complex of problems and issues. What he was after, was not only just a set of recommendations on what to do in the situation, but he also sought as complete a picture as possible of both the demand for foreign languages and the actual supply of foreign language competences in the country. For his perception of the situation was that part of the confusion as to what to do was due to unclarity concerning the actual demand and supply situation.

What the Minister commissioned me -and a Working Group that I gathered around me with his consent- to do was to investigate the demands and supply situation on the one hand, and to draw up a foreign language teaching policy on the other. He did not just order a foreign language needs analysis, as he had done in the '70s (see Claessen et al. 1978). Nor did he solely require a 'political' statement. Especially the former was a very important point in the Dutch context. For so far, needs analyses -however large-scale and however well-conducted- had always failed to have the impact that they were meant to have, because the necessary political 'translation' of the findings had not been provided. In our case, the Minister even promised Parliament formally that he would phrase his future policy concerning foreign languages with express reference to the Action Programme that he had decided to commission.

B. The Design

The Action Programme was meant to be truly 'national'. That is to say, not only did we set out to arrive at as complete a picture as possible of the needs in the field (all languages; all learners; all kinds of needs, e.g. leisure and vocational), but we also had in mind the whole gamut of educational provisions imaginable, not just e.g. those of the regular school system, let alone only those of secondary general education. It was our intention to take the broadest possible perspective in all respects.

Referring you back again, for a moment, to Chart 1, representing the components that go into policy-making in our field, I should say that basically all parts of that model came up for consideration when we developed our policy-recommendations. We did consider various aspects relating to conditions; we did consider where, with whom, choices would have to lie regarding the various options. We mainly, however, dealt with the questions concerning content, especially those relating to which languages to offer to whom, at what age, to what levels, in what educational setting. And, also, we did not shun questions concerning how to teach, although I must confess that we treated questions of teaching methodology with a great deal of care and reserve. Those of you who know the field of teaching foreign languages from the inside, will understand that we did not try to solve the haunting question as to the best method of teaching within the context of this project. Whereas we did conduct research into aspects of supply and demand, empirical

investigation of the didactic question we considered to be outside of the scope of the project that we engaged in.

The Minister wanted to have the policy-recommendations as quickly as possible; he made available just over $300.000 for the purpose. We agreed upon a period of nine months for the whole of the project, a span of time just long enough, I thought, to do the necessary investigations and to develop the recommendations on the basis of them. We divided the project into two Phases, viz. five months for the underlying studies and four months to develop the recommendations.

I will not go into the details of the project. Let me refer you to Chart 4, and just briefly draw your attention to a point or two.

[to be inserted an adapted version of Fig.2 of AILA Paper, as follows:

(Heading:) Chart 4: "Project-Design for National Action Programme"

(there are two boxes, linked by an arrow, labelled PHASE 1 and PHASE 2;

box 1 also holds:

Project Staff

Study 1 Study 2 Study 3

box 2 also holds:

Resonance Group Project Staff Working Group

Delphi Round 1 + Workshop 1

"identification and analysis of problems"

Delphi Round 2 + Workshop 2

"discussion of inventory of options for possible solutions"

Delphi Round 3 + Workshop 3

"draft-formulation of policy-recommendations"

National Action Programme for

Modern Foreign Languages
[see separate sheet]

There were three groups involved in the execution of the project. I have already mentioned the Working Group. It consisted of ten independent persons from different sectors of education, science, and industry and commerce. There was a larger group, of over forty members, selected from the same sectors, called the Resonance Group. The third group were the Project Staff, two full-timers for the duration of the project and three part-timers. The Project Staff conducted the studies, prepared drafts for the Working Group, and coordinated the project as a whole. I was a member of and supervised the Project Staff; I was also a member of and chaired the meetings of the Working Group. The latter group and the Resonance Group, basically, were concerned with the same tasks: they went over the research data and corrected or added to them; they diagnosed problem areas; and they tried to determine how these problems and expected future problems could be solved. Yet their roles differed in a number of respects. The main function of the Resonance Group was to supply as many ideas and solutions -and as many relevant arguments for and against them- as possible. Contrary to the Working Group they did not have to take any responsibility for the recommendations of the Action Programme. The members of the Resonance Group were consulted on our behalf by a research institute, whose services we had hired, in a so-called 'Policy Delphi'. There were three rounds. The Working Group got together a number of times; three times they met for very intensive two-day Workshops.

During the first Phase three studies were executed. In one an extensive inventory was drawn up of all provisions for foreign language teaching in the country, both in formal and in non-formal education. In a second study an attempt was made to outline the available foreign language competence of the country, both on the basis of an analysis of the output of our regular school system -of which I gave you an example at the beginning of this discussion- and of an analysis of all the ethnic groups and their first languages represented in our country. In the third study, finally, a full inventory was attempted of all possible language needs of the country, based on previous needs analyses such as the ones conducted by Claessen et al. (1978) and on extensive interviews, specifically run for this project, with respondents from various sectors of society so as to get an impression of the latest developments.

At this point I would like to stress that in the way that we set up the project, attention was not exclusively focussed on the needs factor. The other factors that we referred to in Chart 2 were very much in the minds of both Resonance Group and Working Group when they were considering the best possible solutions for the various problem areas on the basis of the data derived from the three studies.

C. The Results

The main output of the project, of course, is the list of recommendations together with their justifications that were incorporated in the first volume of the project (Van Els et al. 1990). They will be dealt with presently. Other results are constituted by what the three studies have yielded on actual provisions, on foreign language competences available, and on needs. Let me give you some information on some of these results. I have already, in my Introduction, given you a picture of what we found on the language competence in the country for English, French and German. So I will now restrict myself to supply and demand.

(1) Supply

Our findings clearly do not substantiate the general feeling that we were referring to above that the foreign language competence of the population has been deteriorating over the past few decades. First of all, a much greater proportion of the population learns foreign languages -one way or another, also in formal education- than before, mainly and primarily English, of course. We were even able to show that the proportion of the population that actually learns both French and German on top of English in secondary education has not decreased in the meantime! What has happened, however, -and that may have created the general impression that things have been deteriorating badly in the last few decades- is that on the one hand the percentage of pupils that choose to take all three languages, as a proportion of all those who in these days go through secondary education, has been diminishing. Whereas in the old days every grammar school pupil had to take the three languages right up to final exams after six years of instruction, nowadays they are allowed the choice of dropping one or two languages after four years. The other reason why people think that the foreign language competence of school leavers has gone down tremendously, may well be that the course content has changed over the years and does not any more resemble what they themselves had to go through in their own school days. Whereas traditionally stress was mainly, and often exclusively, on the reading skill and on translation from the foreign language into Dutch -and, often also, on grammar teaching-, the modern curriculum concerns all four skills of language competence, inclusive of the oral productive competence. Adding the other skills to the curriculum has, naturally, meant a reduction of aspects that were in the traditional offering, but why should the net result of these changes be looked upon as a loss?

The main result of our investigation concerning the supply of foreign language competence is, it seems to me, that we now have a much better and a much more detailed insight into what the whole system of formal and informal education provides in the field of foreign languages. The studies in question give a complete outline of how much foreign language teaching there is across the curricula of all formal education and in all types of

informal schooling, i.e. what languages are taught, to what levels, and also in what ways. Moreover, the studies give a clear insight into how many pupils do actually learn foreign languages, for how many years, to what levels, etc.. These insights make it possible to deduct what the sore spots are in the provision as a whole, i.e. what needs are not, or not sufficiently, catered for anywhere in the system. What we can also see now, is where the defects are in the planning of the foreign languages across the system. It turns out that the system is very defective in that respect: pupils working their way through consecutive school types may well find that in a number of ways the foreign languages offered do not at all link up the way they should.

(2) Demand

Our investigation of the needs for foreign languages has supplied us with two major explanations for the fact that the complaints about declining standards have been becoming stronger and stronger over the past few years, even if there has been a demonstrably considerable increase on the supply side. The first explanation is that there has been an increase, quantitatively, both of the number of people needing competence in one or more foreign languages and also of the number of languages needed other than the traditional three. Our findings -also those relating strictly to foreign language use in business- clearly differ from the speculations that Fixman (1990:32) heard from some of her European interviewees, namely that after 1992 European Community businesses would mainly rely on English as the only common denominator in communication. The second explanation for the complaints is that there has been an increasing need, qualitatively, for higher and more varied levels of competence in the languages required. These findings, therefore, corroborate the general feeling that people had when we started our project, even if it may have come as a surprise to some people that the increased need in one area -e.g. for one particular language, for example Spanish- is not accompanied by a decrease in another area, for example French.

Before I enter upon a discussion of the difficult problems that these findings pose to the foreign language teaching policy-maker, let me just draw your attention to one particular further issue -belonging to the "Other Factors" of Chart 2- that stood out clearly in the course of our needs study. It concerns the proper relation between needs on the one hand and objectives of foreign language teaching agreed upon to satisfy those needs, on the other. Too often it is assumed that objectives of foreign language teaching have to be a direct and more or less exact reflection of the needs, in the sense that the language competence acquired by pupils at the end of, for example, secondary school instruction should -at that moment- represent the competence they need to function in later, in 'real life'. That is a misconception, however. The language competence acquired in school undergoes a number of changes after pupils have left school, before it becomes what it is required to be for

'real life'. On the one hand, 'things' are added onto it (: pupils develop further,intellectually and cognitively; they acquire greater competence and confidence in their own and possibly other languages in the meantime; etc.). On the other hand, 'things' are taken away from it, people lose parts of their competence, as we all know too well. About both processes, however, we know very little so far, I am sorry to say. And, we will have a hard job finding out. But in the meantime, we should be aware of the fact that there is no absolute parallel between 'real life' foreign language competence needs, on the one hand, and learning objectives in foreign language programmes, on the other. The impression one gets is that, again and again, we should resist the temptation of straining the boundaries and possibilities of secondary education too much, wanting to make our objectives of teaching resemble too closely the picture that we have been getting from our needs analyses.

4. The Dutch National Action Programme: Recommendations

More or less within the time limits set for the project we were able to present to the Minister of Education the main publication of the project, viz. the volume holding a set of 34 policy-recommendations (see Van Els et al. 1990) touching on a great many of the aspects of the policy-making model of Chart 1. There was an additional set of 5 recommendations concerning the implementation of the Action Programme itself. Time does not permit us to do more than deal with a small number of major themes of the former set.

(1) An overall plan

The recommendations deal with all component parts of the system of formal and informal foreign language teaching. Right from the start it was clear that it would not do to look to the formal system alone, let alone to just secondary education within formal education, to provide for all the language needs of the country. The Working Group soon came to the conclusion that secondary education could not be made to allot more room and time to foreign language teaching than available at present; in one type of general secondary education about one quarter of the lessons is devoted to foreign languages, as it is. But that was not the sole nor the main reason for the Working Group to address the whole of the system, including informal education. The main reason was that each component part of the system has its own specific function within the whole, and that therefore certain language needs may well be better served in one part than in another. One only has to think of specifically vocationally-oriented needs; catering for these in <u>general</u> secondary education might well be fully out of place.

(2) Division of labour

What we have said about the need for an overall plan, implies, of course, that we are also talking of a division of labour between the various component parts of the system. Such division of labour applies to at least the following two issues:

a. what languages to teach when and where;
b. what aspects to teach of any of these languages when and where.

In our proposals, for example, the teaching of all other languages but English, French, German and, partly, Spanish is essentially relegated to other parts of the system outside secondary education. For some languages -those for which the need is minimal- the question is even raised whether they should be offered at all in formal education; why not first consider relying on the rich sources of competence in relevant languages represented by ethnic minorities residing in the country, for example?

With regard to the second issue -what aspects to teach when and where?- we assume that every attempt should be made to make the contents of consecutive language programmes follow on, one upon the other. We not only worry about uneconomical use of time, money and energy in an already overtaxed system, but we also worry about the negative effects that poor planning of course contents can have on pupils' motivation. Not infrequently, pupils -to their dismay- find themselves confronted with the same programme elements, in one school type after another, regularly even with the same course-materials!

(3) Strict(er) regulatory measures

Division of labour as defined just now of necessity leads to questions as to what further concrete regulatory measures one may have to take. In a country like The Netherlands, where there is such a massive demand for foreign languages, a division of labour as to what languages to teach when and where implies -according to the Working Group- that the room for free choices by pupils cannot be but very limited, especially in secondary education.

The need for attuning the contents of language programmes across the system as a whole, moreover, requires a fairly explicit and a fairly detailed formulation of objectives, so that everyone engaged in the field one way or another at least knows what he/she is either in for as a recipient; or, what he/she as a 'provider' is supposed to be working towards and what all the others are supposed to be doing. We have suggested that an all-encompassing framework of objectives for foreign language teaching should be developed, a so-called 'Autonomous Structure', which could serve as a frame of reference for <u>all</u>, formal and informal, foreign language teaching (see for a discussion of the 'Autonomous Structure' Van Els 1989). Besides this, the Working Group has come to the conclusion that Dutch foreign language teaching objectives will, all through the system, have to be made much more explicit and much more detailed than they have been so far.

(4) Closer adjustment of objectives to needs
Keeping in mind the comments that we made a little time ago on avoiding too close resemblances between needs and objectives, the preceding points -paradoxically- nevertheless imply a close adjustment of what is offered in language courses to what have been found to be the needs for the languages in question. What that boils down to, phrased negatively, is that the contents of language courses should not in the first place be determined by the requirements of the 'subject', as they are conceived in the minds of language scholars. They should be derived from the needs felt by those who have to learn the languages. As we have pointed out explicitly enough, I hope, when we discussed our three categories of needs, by needs and needs research we understand the whole gamut of the three needs categories and not just the strictly communicative, or linguistic, needs of the first category. However, that having been said, we have to add that in the Dutch context, where language planning is first and foremost concerned with choices between languages, it is on the basis of the needs of the first category that such choices are primarily made. That in its turn, however, -even if it does exclude the teaching of foreign languages in which linguistic competence is not the central or focal point- does not mean that the actual course content of language programmes is strictly related to only needs of that type.

A final point, I think, I should add here. Adjusting course contents to actually felt needs, according to the Working Group, may also mean that for groups of students -also even in secondary education- possibly only a restricted set of the full array of components of language competence should be prescribed. Our conviction is that teaching the full language may not be necessary with all two, three or more languages that a student may have to learn. For particular languages, actually, only reading competence may be required, for example; and why should there always have to be a literature component in all foreign language programmes? We think there is every reason to further study the feasibility of introducing a system of so-called 'partial qualifications'.

5. Language political viewpoints on a European level

There are two international bodies at work within Europe which are very often mixed up by outsiders -and by 'outsiders' I mean almost anybody also within Europe who is not very well-versed in international affairs or who is not personally involved in work for either of these two organizations. One is the Council of Europe and the other the European Community. Whereas the latter is basically a political body in which 12 European countries work more and more closely together in economic and social matters, gradually working their way to a 'unified Europe' one way or another, the former is a much looser association of over 20 countries -some of them belonging to the unalligned countries-

seeking to promote the improvement within each of the member-countries of a number of major social causes, prominent among them education, by international cooperation and exchange of ideas. Whatever the Council of Europe does, it is always assumed that no political stance is taken which might bind any of the associated member-countries. The European Community, however, does strive towards a further integration of the member-states on all possible counts, and it may, therefore, agree upon specific measures regarding political, economic, social and educational issues, which may then become law in each of the member-states.

What, now, have these two bodies agreed upon or decided to do with regards to foreign languages? There are two levels at least that we should distinguish at which international bodies as the ones under discussion here may get involved in policies for foreign languages. One is the use of languages within the workings of such organizations themselves, for which they will have to devise 'an internal language policy', the other is the use and, thus, the learning and teaching of (foreign) languages within the countries of the organization, both for the purposes of international communication between the citizens of these countries and, possibly even, also for communication purposes within each of the respective countries.

a. Council of Europe

The CoE has, long ago, agreed upon a very practical solution as to what languages to use for all its internal communication. The working-languages of the CoE are English and French. The solution is a very practical one in that in that way a great deal of very costly simultaneous interpretation and translation of documents into all of the other 15 languages or so is avoided. The number of working-languages probably had to be restricted in such a drastic way, because all of the operations of the CoE are run on a very low budget. But also, such a practical solution could be opted for, because -as I said- the CoE was never meant to be an important political institution, so that the language-question could hardly ever turn into a sensitive political issue.

For the same reason, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe have never considered laying down any rules concerning the above-mentioned second level; such statements would not have been in keeping with the basic assumptions of the organization. What the Committee of Ministers has done -a number of times, over the years-, is to study and discuss the importance of the knowledge of foreign languages for the citizens of the member-states. In that connection they have repeatedly, in consecutive so-called Recommendations, stressed the necessity of the teaching of at least one, and possibly two, foreign languages to as many citizens as possible of all the member-states. Moreover, and in line with that, they have tried to promote the learning of foreign languages by engaging in a series of projects, since the early 70s, basically aimed at providing member-countries with tools that might contribute to the improvement of their teaching of foreign languages. As Report (1989:5) has it: "successive

projects have sought to promote and coordinate the free and voluntary cooperation among leading researchers, teachers, experts and administrators in the language field, and the institutions to which they belong, with a view to establishing a consensus on basic aims, what constitutes good practice and profitable lines of development which can be followed up in member countries on a wider scale." It would lead too far to go into any detail as to all the work done under the auspices of the CoE in the context of the various projects over a period of about two decades; also, it is hoped that Dr.John Trim -who was a central force for the whole of that period in all these developments- will soon be spending some time at the Center, and he is much better qualified to discuss the CoE work with you than I am. Let me just briefly bring to mind that in the early stages the expert group that was established in 1971 concentrated most of its attention on ways of formulating 'clear and explicit communicative objectives', which led to the publication of the classic in present-day foreign language didactics, The Threshold Level (Van Ek 1975), which was soon followed by a French-language version, Un niveau- seuil (Coste et al. 1976). The aims of the following Project No.4 (1977-1981), Project No.12 (1982-1987), and the new medium-term programme (1989-1995) have respectively been stated as follows: consolidation and further development of the conceptual framework of the 'Threshold Level', extention of its coverage to other languages than English and French and to other levels of education than adult education, for which it was originally devised (Project No.4); the widespread dissemination and implementation of the principles and methods previously developed through their practical application in a number of key areas (compulsory education; migrant education; and, especially, the preparation of teachers) (Project No.12); and, finally, the new programme's aim is "to provide a framework for effective international cooperation to raise standards of language learning and teaching and teacher training", mainly through what are called 'new-style' internationally staffed and recruited workshops.

b. European Community

Being a fundamentally non-political organization, the CoE has opted for a very practical and sensible 'internal' language policy on the one hand, and has done a great deal to promote the quality of foreign language teaching in the member-countries by providing important tools for everyone to pick up, on the other hand. In contrast, the EC -being an organization of independent countries on their way to some form of political integration- has so far cautiously refrained from any political agreement concerning languages that could in any way be thought to be jeopardising the 'rights' of any of the national languages of the member-states concerned. Thus, for its internal communication the EC has expressly designated all national languages of the Community as working-languages of the organization, despite the tremendous costs involved. And, with regard to the use of

languages between and within its member-states, the same guiding principle of absolute equality of all national languages has always prevented the Community from establishing a policy on (foreign) languages that might in any way be interpreted as promoting the cause of one language over the other(s). The EC is a multicultural and multilingual entity, and that it definitely intends to remain. Of course, also within the EC one has for a long time been acutely aware of the problems that its multilinguality poses to the attempts at an ever closer integration of the member-states. So far, however, that has not yielded anything else but joint statements of intent as to the number of foreign languages that each of the member-states would try to make provisions for in its educational system. The latest of these statements, and most far-reaching, dating back to 1984, holds that every member-state should provide for as many pupils as possible in compulsory education to acquire 'practical competence' in two foreign languages, at least one of which being the national language of another member-state (see Van Els 1988:53). And, it is only as recently as 1989 that the EC has decided upon a Community programme of action to promote foreign language competences within the EC, the so-called LINGUA-Programme. The principal objective of LINGUA is to assist member-states with the 'qualitative and quantitative improvement of foreign language teaching and training'. The means by which this objective is to be achieved, is -basically- the provision of grants by the EC in support of a number of well-defined activities, such as mobility schemes and innovative projects in the initial and in-service training of foreign language teachers, of language learning in vocational and higher education, and of the setting up of strategies for language training in economic life. From a foreign language planning point of view there are two interesting features in the LINGUA-Programme that need to be drawn attention to. One is that all other languages but the national languages of the Community are expressly excluded from the programme. The other is that the multilingual principle of the EC is explicitly invoked to safeguard a preferred position in the working of the programme for the so-called lesser taught and lesser used languages of the Community; there is no hint at all at even the beginning of an awareness at the level of the Community of the need for some kind of planning of the educational provisions for foreign languages in the Community as such or in each of the member-states individually. The making of policies in the field of foreign language teaching will be left to each of the member-states for a long time to come, it seems.

6. Concluding Remarks

My concluding remarks can be very brief. I hope that by now I have made two things abundantly clear:
(1) that a great many considerations go into the making of a policy for foreign language teaching, which was one way of

demonstrating that the phrasing of a separate policy for foreign language teaching is as necessary in all countries as the phrasing of an educational policy in general or of a languages policy as such;
(2) that the examples of the more or less polar opposites of The Netherlands, on the one hand, and the international bodies of the CoE and the EC, on the other, go to show that the roles of central authorities may vary a great deal in these matters.

The obvious conclusion that this country in a great many ways differs fundamentally from The Netherlands, does not free you, however, -if you will allow me this final comment- from having to develop a foreign language teaching policy for the USA.

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The National Foreign Language Center, Washington, D.C.,
11 October 1990

Chart 2: "Factors Determining the Choice of Foreign Languages"

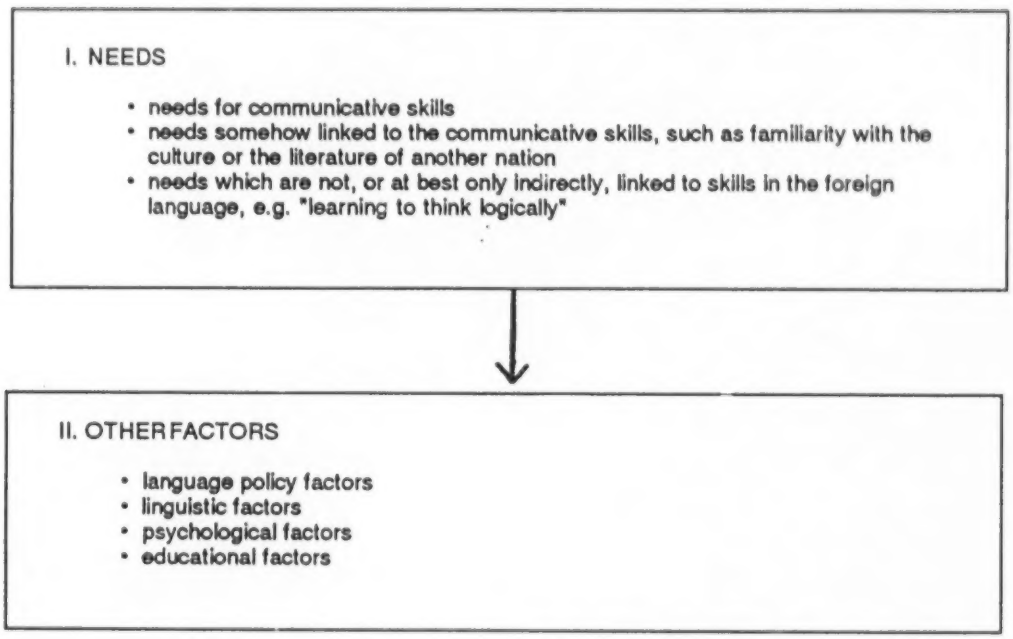
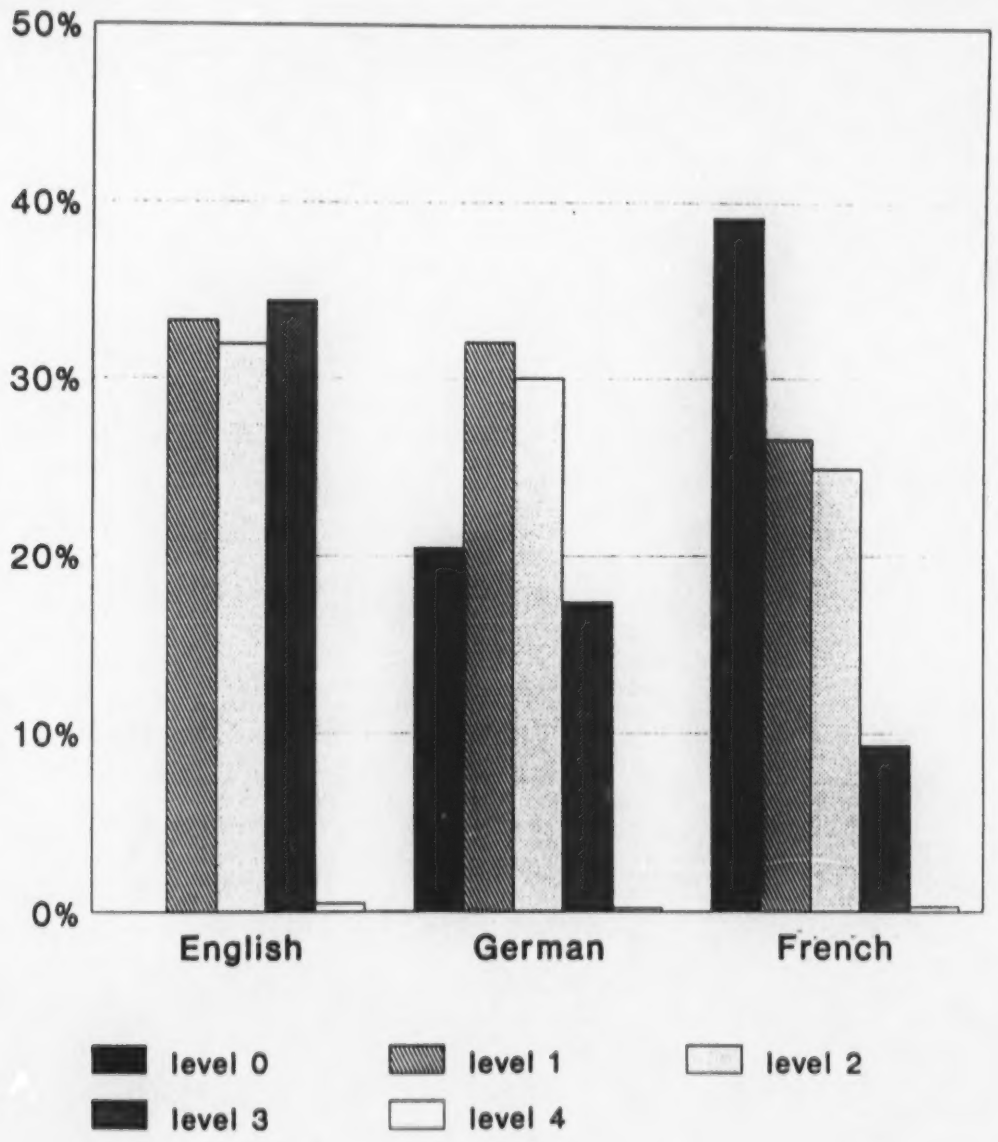

I. NEEDS
• needs for communicative skills
• needs somehow linked to the communicative skills, such as familiarity with the culture or the literature of another nation
• needs which are not, or at best only indirectly, linked to skills in the foreign language, e.g. "learning to think logically"
II. OTHER FACTORS
• language policy factors
• linguistic factors
• psychological factors
• educational factors

Chart 3: "Proficiency Levels for English, German and French of the Dutch 1977-Cohort of Twelve Year Olds"



level 0: no instruction
level 1: two or three years of (basic) instruction, without absolving final exam
level 2: three or four years of basic instruction with diploma, or three or four years of intermediate instruction without diploma
level 3: five and six years of intermediate instruction with diploma
level 4: language specialists from higher education

Chart 4: "Project-Design for National Action Program"

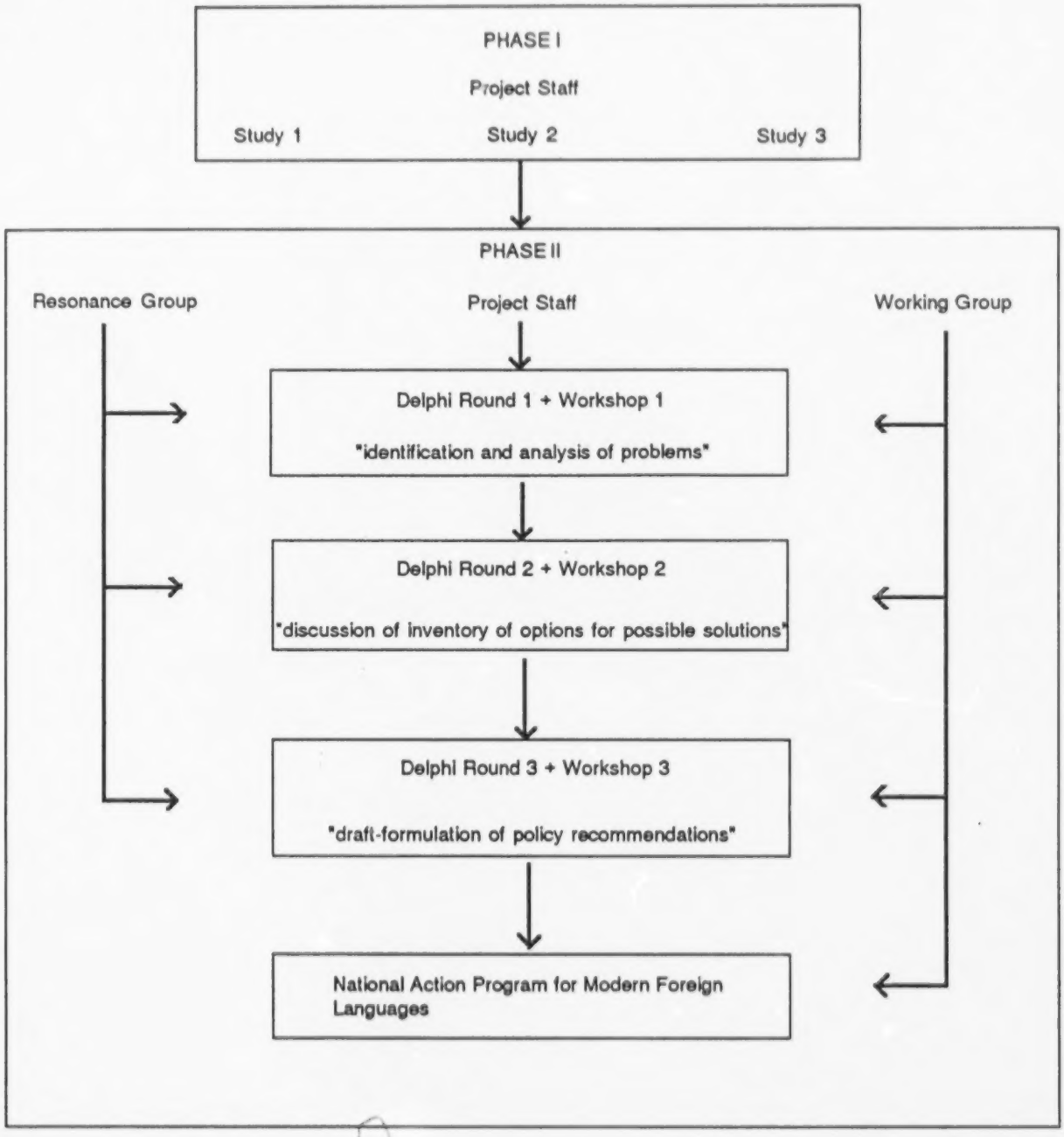


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Chart 1: "Choices" and "Responsibilities" in Foreign Language Teaching Policy-Making

	"Choices" and/or "Responsibilities" Rest With								
						Educational Authorities			
"Choices" concerning Content	pupils	(groups of) parents	(groups of) teachers	head of school	school board	local	regional	national	supra-- national
1. yes/no									
how many									
which									
what content, to what level									
2. to whom, individually or in groups									
at what age, when									
educational setting									
3. method of teaching									
classroom, self-learning									
teaching/learning aides									
"Responsibilities" regarding Conditions									
1. schools, programs, course-materials, etc.									
2. evaluation, testing, exams									
3. teacher training, certification, etc.									